

IALDABAOTH'S DIE

POEMS BY PHILLIP MEDHURST

for
Rebekah and Oliver

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FETHERHOMA

This sark, so fierce, in a trice can shift
To down, cloud-white, that glides above
The sorry squats of thought-bound men.

The wrinkled coast and furrowed lea
Frown as I fare on the road of the swan,
And sing the spells of a soul outgone.

EDEN

Since Adam delved and Eva span
Man's waywardness has spoiled God's plan.
Disease and death here level all;
Our nakedness reveals a Fall.
Though God could make a bush to speak,
A dumb child tells us who is weak:
The Son could make a corpse to eat,
Yet feeding him would be a feat,
For he can neither dig nor spin,
And day by day his limbs grow thin.
Such is the consequence of sin.

LENT

These first-fruits pledge what is to be:
A growing and a ripening sea.
His promise raises us from sleep
And leads us out across the deep.

SCAPEGOAT

Each head, bowed down with several cares
Is raised to watch the sacrifice
Proceed to where Jehovah waits
To host a feast that famishes.
This flock anticipates a goat
That stumbles on the precipice.
We cannot spare our sympathy.
With it our karma vanishes.

SACRIFICE

A sacrifice like Abel's is required:
No shrieking root torn up,
Or apple plucked and dashed,
But some born thing, with sentience,
Whose face, bewildered by the knife
Will stare as life flows out.

That way our God is satisfied,
Reclaiming what he once bestowed,
Maybe, heartless, envying
This creature-kind who lived
And loved the crimson blood too much –
As though it were its own.

ANNUNCIATION

As swift as eye-of-reason's blink
Consent, in waiting, parted lips.
As quick as pulse could leap to beat
Of wing, her cry let fly to air
Where word met Word. Thunder unrolled –
Salvation's sentence in pursuit
Of spirit's lightning dart to soul
Pre-hushed. Her heart, inviolate still,
Now known, knew all. So All the valley
Filled, and pure Love's river swelled,
Then brimmed to shed its tide on time.

CONCEPTION

Mary, maid and mother – both –
Conceives divinity.
(Fire, we're told, does not consume
Her pure virginity).

You who tread on holy ground
Put on simplicity.
If He is to be born, God needs
All your complicity.

ICON

Though man-proportioned, Christos shrinks:
A God kenotic made.

EPIPHANY

In inky shadows sages scratched,
Got drunk on mythic wines.
Philosophies were sometimes hatched
From patterns in the signs.

Yet three, drawn on by astral light,
With minds as clear as day,
Traversed the sands to catch a sight
Of Truth in swaddled clay.

ROOD

A tree is butchered into beams,
Torn flesh emblematised,
As Jesse's rod is re-conceived -
Delivered cruciform.

Adorned with jewels, hung with gold,
The ark becomes a rood.
A flotsam of humanity
Drowns in a sea of blood.

MATER DOLOROSA

Pains of childbirth, then of dispossession,
Leaping heart, then steady retrogression
Was all angelic flutters came to bring.
Fair salutations had a farewell sting.

And Death's dark angel did not pass my door,
But slammed the board, demanding more and more.
My God, you owe this to me: let me see
Wherefore my child has now forsaken me.

I want to see him rise to tear the veil,
And borne by angels his kind father hail,
As his bejewelled banner he unfurls,
His blood its rubies and my tears its pearls.

DESCENT

My heart goes down to Hell with him,
Though I must shut my eyes
To what he sees. I fear the dark,
But trail with quiet tread
Lest he looks back,
And weakening, lets me cling to him.

For he has work to do within
That senseless void, and I
Must be a hovering thing and hope
That he will see the light
Again, and say
That unmade, made again, is good.

EXODUS

O Christ, thy crown is broke in two pieces:
Give half to me, O give half to me.
O Christ thy cloak is riven in pieces:
Give some to me, O give some to me.
And I will mould a smaller crown,
And patch a cloak for me.
And I shall go down, down,
Down unto the sea.
And the sea shall part for me.

NOLI ME TANGERE

To me it seemed a comforting idea,
Too welcome, too sublime to be untrue
That love and meaning could thus rendez-vous:
Be gazed upon, and touched.

But doubts persist that I imagined Him.
When He did not appear I then assumed
A love that God in fact was loath to show
Unto The Crucified.

Yet can there be conclusion to my grief
If I can never cling to one who walks
Within the graveyard of my dreams, with voice
Unsilenced by his pain?

And does my vision promise me too much?
Does Christ Himself recoil from ill-placed trust,
Compelled to say, "Noli me tangere" –
That flesh can never stay.

SAMSON

Sam found a little knife
While wand'ring in the ward.
When nurses tried to truss
The old man to a chair,
He cut their knotted tape
And made good his escape.
But is he strong enough
To grab with steady hand
The starched lapel of Life-
In-Death's white coat and crash
That cranium's empty dome?
That way, he might get home.

NOEL

Incandescent lamp-posts glow
Brightly through the shower of snow.
The tombstones, wet,
Reflect a flash
Of fake resuscitation.
The pale scene vaunts
Beauty unmarred,
Unstained by obscene flesh.
How perfect and pristine! –
Unspoilt by bestial notions
Of God dropped in the hay,
And livestock's smoky breath
Set to thaw Death.

TERESA

A cherub pressed me to my knees:
He held a flaming spear.
He struck again, and then again:
As much as I could bear.

I soon abandoned all desire
For this sweet pain to cease.
No other bliss compares to this
Felicitous disease.

I greet this torment willingly.
I fondly hug the wound.
Love's quarry, breathless, flees no more,
For she is run to ground.

AQUERO (LOURDES)

Within this cave I heard "That Thing"
Disclosing how our prayers
Could kindle light, transfiguring
Those crippled by their cares.

And thus re-made, a sluggish flow
Could spring to healing spate.
Old bones could pave the way to show
Changed flesh, immaculate.

Illumined by the moon, the night
Revealed to preternatural sight
An azure cincture round the earth
As clay, by grace, brought Hope to birth.

LAZARUS

I curse the day on which my so-called friend,
Persuaded by my sisters, chose to come
And bellowed at me in my cosy den
Where I had slept for days all neatly wrapped
In perfumed swaddling-bands. For up till then
My aches and wants and cares were left outside
My fortress sealed against the world and time.
But now I am re-born with my old bones.
Conclusion to my life has all been robbed:
I must endure the painful swell again.
Though I am made a sign I now repent
The impulse of my blood which leapt too quick,
For peace by any should not be disturbed
When it by natural means has been conferred.
When brute creation first brought me to birth,
I felt no obligation. Flesh and all
I made of it was mine. But now each breath
Compounds my debt to an impatient god.

THE WORD

Between the bone and marrow
Penetrates the arrow
Of your Word. And so
Salvific poison spreads.

Once it takes hold
All worldliness contracts
To lodge that head
Below my heart.

There is no antidote,
For – sweet Mercury –
The chemistry must kill
What kills, then save outright.

This unevaded shaft
Invades me. I must yield.
For once it has arrived,
It lives and thrives.

PIETA (MICHELANGELO)

I bear this weight with dignity,
For meaning is in symmetry -
Or so it seemed that way, before
I lost my elasticity.

I chiselled him – the crucified –
As handsome then: a slumbering lord,
And Mary still resplendent in
Her prime, and poised, and aureoled

In draperies. But now he droops
As heavy as a corpse will be,
And she, wrapped up against the cold,
Just clutches at this clod, her son.

I had to come in person and
Join in this undertaking, but
I'm growing old, now don't know
Where beauty is. And that's the truth.

EUCCHARIST

*The rich reduced, the poor endowed,
The weak are raised to thrones of power.
The good Lord rules while kings are cowed;
He undermines the tyrant's tower.*

In tatters, stripped, from field or hedge,
God calls us to his banquet spread.
Supersubstantial manna falls,
Our daily nurture.

*The full are starved, the empty fed,
The fertile pine, the barren bear.
He flattens fields, gives landless bread;
Both weal and woe our God can share.*

I am his wheat. I shall be ground
By tooth of beast to make fine flour,
Unleavened bread - to do His will,
As done in heaven.

JONAH

In the belly of Leviathan
Species of dismemberment
Float past, the beast's repast.
How the staring fishes swim
Along the gastric stream
Towards oblivion.

Shards of exoskeletons
Roll on down the sewer
That serves up sustenance.
The storm abates.
Repentance circulates
In the putrid air.

The monster swims,
Its tail flicking
The now-still waves.
The sky clears.
I patiently await
A resurrecting belch.

FRANCESCO

My verdict is as follows (mark it well):
Francesco Bernadone is a fool.
He thinks that he can strip our Mother Church,
And rob her of her dowry held in store.

If she is to be wed to high-born men,
We should not treat her grossly as a whore
Who gives her favours freely, from the heart,
To all who beat a path up to her door.

Cathedrals are not built with lepers' hands,
Or chantries by mere gutter-deaths endowed.
Bejewelled shrines must dazzle tear-filled eyes,
Not rustic dolls laid out on heaps of straw.

Francesco and his half-crazed crew may stalk
Unto their hearts' content this countryside,
But they shall not invade our frescoed walls,
Or stigmatise the icons we adore.

We rest secure beneath our mosaiced domes.
The chant of priest, the tinkle of the coin,
Ensures the soul's release, the sinner's balm,
While gospel-truth is safe beneath the floor.

GALAHAD

Behind the grimy concrete and
Glaucoma'd glass old Pelles groans.
He feels the stain grow wider from
His thigh, and looks for meaning in
The ceiling cracks.

Mordrain, spastic quadriplegic,
Turns towards the upraised Host. (His
Head is all that moves.) The priests some
Formulaic salve dispense from
Tarnished pyx.

Elsewhere a youth is kneeling at
A stream, and catches silver to
His downy lips. By this refreshed,
He cycles on again to do
Sick-visiting.

BLACK HOLE

Not in control,
A big black hole
Pulls you in
Towards oblivion.

I thought I sensed
Something beyond.
Surely nonsense
For only no-one

Rules the world,
Until it's rolled
Up like a scroll
Inside that hole.

And did I see
A face look down?
Maybe I did.
It wore a frown.

PASSOVER

We pass over unknown lands
Going east. We only hear,
Seeing nothing, tunnels
Echo and rattle.
The wherefore fades
Of our herding to
This trembling wagon,
Rubbing shoulders
Bolt upright.

I still hope, regardless,
For a little red house,
Or a little white house,
A chimney, smoking,
Children singing
In snow-showers, white as ash.
For then
I shall be free:
Work shall make me so –
Away from fear incontinent,
The stink of rank despair.

Divested of the vanity
Stitched inside my gabardine,
Will a cyclone be
The redeemer from all
The powers that be,
As I scramble, naked, up
The mound of sacrifice,
In breathless affirmation of
The riddle of "I am,
We are," finally solved?

FINNESBURG

Brand beat edda,
Doom on doom.

SARCOPHAGUS

Seianti Hanunia Tlesana
Now wants to protest. But the lack of
Her jaw-bone and loss of her front-teeth
(As well as her flesh) means that she is
Unable to speak for herself and
Is glad to accept this scribe's service.
When still in her prime she foresaw in
Her wisdom decay would prevail. Thus
Some clay was amassed, and instructions
Were given to artists to model
Her image seductive and buxom,
All tinted in natural colours.
Thus she was shown forth as a gift to
The future, that this work of beauty
Might sound a soft echo of pleasures
That she brought to men. The fine lady,
This done, could put up with old age and
The dribbling of lips that in youth were
Adorned with love's whispers and kisses
Before her sweet breath became foetid.
And so her life's shade could endure the
Denial of sunlight, content that
Her beauty shone over her coffin,
Preserved just as she had decided.
But cruel necromancers, the priests of
Your science, put flesh on the time when
She did not have beauty, so they could
Enjoy some cold cerebral pleasure.
What shame has achieved for the sum of
Man's pleasure has cost her too much. In
The impotence that death has imposed, her
Indignant remonstrance can not be
Sustained without pity's assistance

In place of the promptings of love. But
True praise, she asserts, must derive from
Erections desired, not from duty.
Recall this masque, and while you have a tongue
Pronounce out loud once more its long-lost name.

ZARDOZ

Immortality confounds
our zest for life.
Apathy has frozen us
To monuments.

Come, Oblivion, as friend:
a longed-for harm,
Pyramidic heavy, light
as chambered dust.

Death Eternal grant, O Lord
of Sudden Ends.
Smeared with narcoleptic balm
your bullets sing.

DESPERADO

If I knew what the living of this life
Obtained, I would obtain it. All that strife,
Anxiety and hurt would contribute
To some exchequer full of meaning's loot
Which, plundered from the stinking hold
Of death, would help me to pay off, all told,
Those bitter creditors who lay in wait
At each day's wakening – not in this state
Of ignorance, bankrupt, without defence,
To give up hope without a recompense.
For once I rose, then fell. Again I rose
And staggered to this path. This one I chose,
To leave a trail (which will be overgrown within
Another lifetime) – not that I begin
Anew: my marks and tracks haphazard fell
Throughout this forest floor, which scarcely tell
Of feet that trod this way. For no-one cares.
Each too in isolation, lost, each fares
Towards a light too briefly glimpsed, before
A rush of wind removes what we just saw –
If not imagined. Then, sometimes, we look
To see if we can scry within the brook
From which we drink an image of the stars.
Instead, the canopy of boughs, like bars,
Blots out the sky, an ever-growing lid
Built by our past mistakes – nor can we bid
It stop. It grows and grows. The image of
The light which we remember up above
Gets dimmer as we go. And so our trail
Bequeaths no thing of value, and we fail
To teach to those who follow a true way.
We came. We stopped. We went. We had our say.
And whether night or day, it makes no sense:

Our toil receives no lasting recompense.
The arbit'ry division of the days
As hours, minutes, seconds; and the ways
In which these segments must be spent; and how
We should be happy and fulfilled; who bow
To, who revere; and where we are consigned
To at our death: all these make chains that bind
Us. We embrace these shackles, since the free
Must for themselves define what they must be:
What "happy" is, and what should make them sad,
And wherein dwells the good, and where the bad.
Night brings no rest unless we lose ourselves
Inside a dream-world where our psyche delves
Into those wishes unfulfilled, beyond
The grasp of nightmare's reach, a pond
Beneath whose surface deep desire thrives
Without diminishing our thwarted lives;
A magic chalice where all beauty lives,
Which takes from no-one, ever – only gives
To all, and none must beg: its grace
Wells up to all, and all can find a place.
But dawn's cold light reveals it full of lies.
Best not to dream when we must close our eyes.

IDA (THE FOSSIL)

In this, the Sabbath vigil of my life, I found
Myself prostrate, all helpless on the ground,
For sin had made me blind. It was as though
Throughout my life I strayed, and did not know
Where I was going or from whence I came,
Just led by some ephemeral, dancing flame
Snuffed out once it was glimpsed, and dead to sight
Before it could be fixed – the moth's mad flight
More full of rhyme and reason than my life,
Now so replete with grief and full of strife.

I've looked at ev'ry explanation that
There is of life, and none come near to sat-
Isfying all criteria of truth,
Or come up with the necessary proof
That they're the answer. All require a leap
Into absurdity – alright for sheep
Who find their comfort in conformity,
But useless for all lone-wolves such as me.
There is a way to make it work, of course,
Which is: to put on blinkers like a horse

And go just where the drayman tells you to.
But in your heart you'll know it to be true
That, even though you're willing to work hard,
All roads end up inside the knacker's yard.
"Arbeit macht frei" is true to a degree,
But not the way we wish that it could be.
A product of conception, you will be
From life aborted, howe'er belatedly.
Meanwhile, you strive where chance gives no reward:
Your feeble hand upturns an empty gourd.
And so our ends are like a jelly-fish:

Sans spine, sans brain, a wat'ry upturned dish
Borne on through vastness we cannot perceive,
Still less control enough to steer. Believe
We may, but proof of purpose or a plan
Revealed consistently denied, we can
Not fabricate from our own stuff, for we
Are empty, blind, insensate, falsely free,
Borne on by tides, by winds, by currents, all
Uncomprehended, landing where we fall.

The birds seem free; no wonder, then, the dove
Is symbol of God's Spirit from above.
But what became of all the other birds
That Noah released, and of all the herds
Of beasts not taken to the ark? – They died.
And that same Spirit, free to tell, denied
Us details of their wretched fate. So we
Can go into oblivion. We are free
To die and be forgotten; the elect
Disclose God's will to naturally select.
Just like a snail I leave a glistening train
To be erased by the first fall of rain;
Or, like the scarab, roll a ball of dung,
My pyramid for when I have no tongue
To extol my own deeds. For like that bird,
(Though it may seem unlikely and absurd)
The phoenix, from the ashes (I surmise)
Once fire is spent I presently will rise
To live again; although we know within
That in this legend ashes are the “fin”.

And yet I hope that soon this week will end,
That dawn will break, and broken hearts will mend
So that a wholesome Sabbath day will bring
Enlightened rest; that birds again will sing
Instead of fearsome rustlings in the dark;

And the whole world will be a pleasant park:
The wood in which we wandered just a copse,
A refuge for the timid beast, which hops
To cover, then comes out at will to see
The sunlight play, no need at all to flee
From hungry predator. A dream! As such
It does not heal, but just provides a crutch
For fractured consciousness, which seeks in vain
To mend its broken world, where only pain
Defines reality, and we are lame,
And cannot run, compete against, or tame
The ravening beast which seeks us, and devours
The meagre gleanings of successful hours.
The dawn will show a good God to be lies,
And noonday sun expose a Lord of Flies.

I know the time is nigh: the global scale
Has tipped towards destruction. Soon the tale
Of all man's deeds and misdeeds will just stop,
And end in silence. Sin's ripe fruit will drop
And smash upon the ground of all our being.
That ground may then remain, all else then fleeing,
As cold and hard as it has ever been,
Unheard, unsmelt, untouched and all unseen
By anything that mars the pristine scape
Of nothingness with any wanton shape
Irrelevant to Being-in-Itself -
All life placed on that continental shelf
Where fossils lay well out of sight and out
Of mind, mere rocks embedded there to flout
The law of life which says that we must change,
And we must use our power to arrange
Some continuity of gene, no noise
To rattle or disturb death's equipoise.
So IDA is our perpetuity,
Extinct and petrified where none can see.

MONUMENT

I wish to leave some monument, before
I die, so I am able to reflect
On what I should have been; because the shore
That I must pass has no return, once wrecked
The only ship that might have brought me home -
Dismembered, rolling on the pallid foam

Of the Dark Sea. From splintered matchwood, who
Could reconstruct the beauty of that boat,
Or purpose, why and where it meant to go
In carrying my soul, how it would float
Back to that far original sunrise
Whose light exposes what is truth, what lies,

And what the nature of its cargo was?
So I must build a ship for death, a barque
That bears a memory of me, because
That other ship, my body, will not hark
Back to my life, for once its subtle winds
Become dispersed, and once the cord that binds

It has been cut by fate's capricious hand,
Then those still travelling upon the sea
May never contemplate before they land
On shore unknown my last vitality,
As once I did in tombs that I then saw
Like upturned boats upon the Lycian shore.

Of what then can I build this ark of mine,
To bear within my immortality?
What oak or ash can I cut down, what pine
Or cedar hew for my security?
Whatever forest, and whatever wood,
I shall be taking what has been made good

By other planting, toil and nurture, long
Before the hand that plunders that slow growth
Had digitally sprouted from among
The cells established by a plighted troth
Of two conjoined in random circumstance
By centripetal force of nature's dance.

And who am I to pluck the fruit of slow
Maturity? Such sacrilege negates
All righteous memory. Where can I go
When every broken bough thus violates
The work of nature if not husbandry,
And tooth of saw destroys a legacy?

The matter that I work on must needs be
Some thing I almost made from no thing –
An interstice which every one can see
And filled by what I was – a vacant ring
Become a diadem, a hollow bell
That tolls a fame no mortal voice could tell.

Perhaps the treasure I will use to deck
My ship was won by force of arms, and set
A record straight, a torque torn from the neck
Of a foul enemy who won a bet,
And came by it without a just dessert –
A harvest sprung from bitterness and hurt,

Now righteous cause of this my great effect.
Or maybe I could cause to rise from dross
Some thing magnificent, some thing correct
From what was wrong, to turn what was a loss
Into a gain, and thereby leave my mark,
And turn a waste, perhaps, into a park –

But then be charged with exploitation of
Goods purchased at a knock-down price, a way
To white the sepulchre I raised above
A mess of bones that will not rise, the pay
That I must give, too grudgingly,
To get what should be rendered to me free:

Unstinting praise from men for my good deeds
Which should be done with no reward in mind,
Except to make a no thing of those needs
Which buried folk alive, and help them find
A new beginning. This should be the way
My chantry-priest receives his fee to pray;

For well we know that knights of olden times
Paid handsomely for masses in their name,
Because the ones who wondered at their tombs,
Illiterate, saw eulogies in vain,
But yet could hear an echo of the gold
Which brought a kind of warmth to what was cold

And hard: the real blood enchaliced there
(At least to faith if not to sight) spelled life
Eternal to a statue's stony stare,
And monkish chant could pass for keen of grief
As long as those whose arms, there carved, prevailed,
And could ensure it was for them it wailed.

But now the masses read. And read they shall,
If they are so inclined to now descend
These metered steps, to read upon the wall
Of this my tomb my verse, just how my end
Has justified my ragged means: my lines
That vanish to eternity in signs.

So thus it is: my ship for death, festooned
With leaves torn from the story of my life,
A rich thesaurus where each item, honed
From love and hate, from passion and from strife
Goes up in flames that blend with setting sun,
And sheds some light on what was lost, what won.

Except no one will read it, that's a fact –
Unless their own concerns will prompt them to.
Then my reflections in a mirror cracked
Become a virtual quarry for some new
Memorial to some one unknown to me
Which leaves no trace of what I used to be.

So that's the end of it, the full stop to
My life, the chiselled epitaph obscured
By overgrowth, my only hope a clue
In worn-out letters made out on the floor
Made smooth by those who come, then go
Of what the story was of those below.

APOCRYPHON

Four-times-four centuries out of view,
First born, then buried, then born anew,
Seth was my father, Eugnostos my groom,
Gongessos my midwife, Charaxio my tomb.
Through three-score summers the dust-cloud of gold
Released at my re-birth has brightly rolled
Around the globe – the Nile's gift of reeds
Kindled by knowledge and sowing light's seeds.
Though delivered third-hand to your perception,
I am, nonetheless, The Immaculate Conception.

SOPHIA

Conceived immaculate, I nonetheless
Wished for a thing exclusive to myself,
And so I exercised effective will,
With freedom to elect as I desired.
Engend'ring Self, therefore, I hatched a god
Out of the womb of all that made me "me."

But who I willed was not immaculate:
He marred the vision I had once enjoyed
While contemplating all reality.
He gazed at his reflection on The Deep,
And when he saw it, thought that it was good,
And said, "I AM. There is no god but me."

I heard the idol's bombast. In this way
I knew what kind of thing the upstart was,
So turned again in sorrow to my Source,
And caught a spark which turned to living flame
Fed by the fuel of Love. That fire took shape,
And all religion tries to emulate

Appeared. No seeing eye could ever then resist
The Light transcending every faculty
By which these words are imaged on true hearts:
"The One is one (there is no other One) –
Unsigned in any mortal register,
And self-subsistent, without any peer.

Thus none can speak of One except this Word
Proceeding from the Gnosis – I am He."
On meeting Matter's realm this testament
Fell to The Deep as incandescent drops
Into that space and time where nature's laws
Are fetters from which none can be exempt.

Yet what descended still remains unquenched
Although bemired within this tomb of clay:
Knowing the beginning and the end,
From whence it came, and whither it must go.
A distant beacon for that Light, I send
What light I have, what wisdom I dare show.

GENESIS

The Gnosis issued forth, and stood at once
In rank with Forethought, born to mother true,
Who by her wish had helped to bring him forth.
The One whose sight blinds mortal eye was glad
To see effulgent fruit swell on His bough,
And He anointed him with chrism pressed
From His own goodness, and from His own store
Of overflowing virtue's essence, pure.
And thus endowed, he waited on his source,
And added to the glory that no eye
Can see of his progenitor, and His
Prevenient grace, the matrix of the All.

And Gnosis asked for Truth. The One agreed,
And swift on His consent that Truth came forth,
And joined the heavenly rank of all who dwell
As mind ineffable. But Truth would speak,
And so the Word then issued forth and joined
The sphere in which Truth lives and moves and has
Its being. And from that Word, imbued with Light
And Life, came what could turn a Word to Deed.
By active Word, Sophia came to be.

But she desired a thing exclusive to
Herself. This thought was not inert, and so
It reified: short of perfection, shorn
Of that ideal beauty typical
Of her who gave him birth, a thwarted clone
Of one true-born of heavenly gene and stock,
All self-engendered, selfishly conceived.
The One had not engaged or wed with her
In union divine; no spouse or sire
Had courted her consent, no nuptial bliss

Had blessed the product of chaste amity;
For what she willed was without conference
Of family, or consummation of
Conjugal love; concupiscence instead,
Without relationship, a fantasy impure,
And alien to the hymns its Mother sang
When in accord with her pure ancestry.
In this her wish came true: a monster formed,
A snake with lion-jaws and eyes that blazed
With horrid fire of self-will. She cast
It out, beyond the zone of purity
Where he might not be seen by all her peers:
From Wisdom born, in ignorance to dwell.
She gave her child a name, as it befits
A ruler who inherits a great power:
It is Ialdabaoth, matter's prince.
Ialdabaoth strutted forth, and marched
From place to place, far from the place where he
Was born. And annexing still more he formed
Self-glorifying spheres of fire that still
Flare on unto this day in heaven's dome.

The tyrant raised his hand – his arrogance –
And masturbated, got Authorities,
Egged on by fantasies of unknown realms.
And as Sophia's light within him shone
And gave him unique power: because of this
He blasphemously called himself a god.
So he created seven Angels, each with Powers
Sufficient for a year of days, and all
In mimicry of that intuited
From what was long before. But those whom he
Begot, those children of the ignorance
And dark, lacked intimation of the source
And principle from which all things had come.
A week of angels this way rules the world,

For Ialdabaoth, who is Saklas, has
A multitude of faces, more than all,
So he can show himself in any face,
Just as he wills. He shares his nature with
Them – ev’rything except the pristine power
That he drew from his mother, Wisdom: that
He would not share. This made him cosmic lord,
Conferring – as he thought – divinity
Upon his minion powers. And their "god"
Gave each a place to dwell, a so-called "heaven".
Their urge to rule instilled makes them believe
That they are gods; but Truth is not deceived:
Their bestial natures are revealed to those
Who know. Their god-like attributes are part
And parcel of a fantasy dreamed up
By Saklas; but illusion will not have
Its way – except with those who dwell within
The dream. The light of Truth will chase away
The fog, dissolve its shifting, swirling shapes
Which scare all the deceived like flimsy masks
Pinned onto wind-puffed cloaks. Such images
Invoke some dread reality, from which
They draw their fearful influence and power.
And so it was with these, for Saklas shaped
His schemes upon a kind of memory
Of what he had experienced in the womb
Of what is truly real. And when he saw
The world he had created all laid out,
And gazed upon the panoply which he
Had spun, enveloping his nakedness,
His tongue clapped in his bell, and said:
“I am a jealous god. There is no god
But me.” And so in his stupidity
He gave the game away, and told his friends
There was a God who spurned “Divinity” –
The title of this insane jealousy.

The Mother then became aware of her
Deficiency, and how her light had dimmed.
For when she saw her blemishes within
The light of the Pleroma, she then drew
Across her face a veil of darkness: she
No longer could return her consort's smile
Without deception, and be unabashed.
Her holy fear caused her to hover at
The gate of Truth, unable to go in.
For when her offspring in his arrogance
Had taken power from his Mother, he
Was ignorant of any provenance
And thought her womb was all that there had been.
Infatuated with his handiwork,
He placed himself upon a pedestal,
An idol to himself. And so she turned;
And so was heard in her humility.
For now she knew what kind of thing he was,
And how he lacked perfection's symmetry.
Up to her source she raised her tear-filled eyes.
He gave the consent, and so a healing flood
Of cleansing holiness washed over her
To make her whole; for Providence agreed
To supervise her in austerity
Within a place of penance set aside
Beyond carnality and snares of sin,
Where she could re-acquire her modesty.
And then a voice came forth: "Behold the Man!"
And when the chieftain of the Powers heard
He had no inkling of from whence it came.
At once, however – ignorant or not –
They were aware – to their damnation – that
There was a holy, perfect Source above:
The Mother-Father, Parents who brought forth
All that there is, and whose beneficence
Was now displayed in dazzling Anthropos.

A shiver went through Ialdabaoth's world,
And rippled through its fundamental sands.
And in the sky the purest element,
Transfigured by the bright epiphany,
Revealed that Truth is Beauty, Beauty Truth.
And so the carnal gang beheld a light
Infuse the cavern of the world below.
Their eyes were opened, and they saw revealed
The shimmering glory of the Son of Man.

The upstart god addressed his fawning clan:
"Come let us make a thing like what we saw
To give some aim and purpose to our plans."
So each and every one of them then gave
A little something from his psychic pouch,
And made an entity from out themselves,
Each adding layer on layer of plastic stuff,
Along the lines of what they had just seen.
Thus a reflection creaturely became,
And looked just like the sole original –
The perfect Anthropos. And then they said,
"Now let us call him Adam, that his name
May light our high road to imperium."
And so this wondrous work, this body came
About – not yet of flesh, but harbouring
A vital force that tapped the secrets of
Their universe, their sevenfold harmony,
Encapsulated microcosmically
In sense and a potential agency.
And yet there was something in short supply:
The thing had no vocation to fulfil,
And thus no will to try, and lay inert.
No aspiration graced that dawning day.
Sophia wanted to retrieve the power
Which she had given to her bastard son.
In innocence she came and humbly asked

The Mother-Father of transcendent All
Who is most merciful. And He decreed
That Gnosis should go down to that cold place
Where ignorance prevails.

Elsewhere, within
The stony hearts of all the Powers the weed
Of envy sprang. Their flaws exposed by this
Wise luminosity, they cast the Man
Into a pit, heaped on him all their dung,
The heavy excrescence of their days.
So Adam came within the mortal sphere,
Coiled there and then of base material,
Engendered from desire within the dark,
Enlivened by a soul-less breath, mere air.
Thus was our fetter forged, our dungeon made,
By which these bandits now enslaved the Man,
Who, in the darkness, soon forgot the light
And grew accustomed to the stench of death.
And then Heimarmene was made, so that in time
The cruellest jailer shackled all his being,
With an array of manacles and chains
Called times and seasons, moments, ages, dates,
Those fetters from which none could be exempt
Outside the All, nor gods nor mortal men,
Now doomed to live within a space of time
That was the past, or will be days to come –
But never now, the present never seized,
With minds obsessed with what will be and what
There might have been, with schemes and plans
stretched to
Infinity, but that eternal now
Beyond their ken. And hence the consciousness
Of the Beyond eluded Man again.
And furthermore he was engenderised,
By which the husband, stronger than the wife

In limb, for males might claim a spiritual
Domain irrelevant to Truth derived
From high authority – for Saklas knew
He must divide and rule.

And thus it was
Ialdabaoth's die was cast and stamped
On all; and in his image, in due course
Two sons were born, and Cain and Abel named;
And thanks to Saklas, human creatures were
Endowed with seed to replicate themselves,
The carnal and the psychic; one inspired
By wind, the other by Sophia's ghost.
Meanwhile, within a bower of Life the Man
Called Adam met the Woman Eve, and each
Encount'ring each within their very core
Begot the Son of Man called Seth, the True.
This son and all his offspring, blessed by those
On high, are called to dwell in heaven's courts,
And taught to trace their names inscribed upon
The scroll of Life, while monuments to flesh
Collapse, their epitaphs erased. For those
Who truly live cannot abide the dark:
They must illumine all the catacombs
Where the enlightened have been forced to dwell,
And lead them to the sunlight up above.
Thus shall the righteous gather, and assist
Each other on the way, that true mankind
Might find its rightful place within the All,
And holiness, made whole, might be complete.

EPILOGUE

I leave these frail and perishable leaves;
To rot just where they fall. The seed I've sown
And you take to the mould, perhaps may rise;
Although what fruit to bear I cannot say.
And as for me, who made this papyrus
To lay my aching head on bed of reeds,

Will I – in crumbling cradle quietly
Asleep, my pains all parked and epitaphed
Outside that trench dug deep to shield my shell
Against all shocks – will I unready then
Grow tongue to shape a curse on that grim Day
When an archangel's voice might bellow down

Into my inert den? Will I be born
Again, the life-force thawing my cold blood,
Its swell conveying me to God knows where?
For, "He who dies acquitted is of sin",
The apostle says; but at this threatened doom,
My breath must state my case, accountable.

That case is this: I hope my wanton flesh
Did not degrade the hopes I here expressed
I hope my leaves heal you before they die,
As though from Tree of Life, and in our mould
Which harbours many seeds, I hope what is
Sown here will one day sprout to bear bright fruits

As beautiful as gems; and if the "will"
Of what will be's replaced by "should", then let
Unmade, thus made again, be all made good.
If here you find the truth of what we are
Well-charactered, then of your charity
As well as for yourself, now pray for me.

Phillip Medhurst was born in Leicester, England in 1948. Educated at Alderman Newton's Grammar School, he read English at Wadham College, Oxford. After graduation he trained for the Anglican ministry. On ordination he served in a South London parish while qualifying as a schoolteacher at Goldsmiths' College. For over two decades he taught religious education in both state-funded and private schools. In 1982 his son was permanently disabled as result of a road traffic accident, and this caused Phillip to radically reassess his religious beliefs – leading to his realisation as a Christian Gnostic. He is now retired and devotes his time entirely to writing and fine art. He lives alone in Kidderminster.

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